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ABSTRACT

These three papers were presented at a symposium on orchestrating work and learning in human resource development (HRD) moderated by Susan Lynham at the 1996 conference of the Academy of Human Resource Development. "Team Learning: Processes, Interventions and Assessment" (Laurel S. Jeris et al.) explores team learning processes, paying specific attention to the degree of learning facilitator assistance needed for teams to engage in double-loop learning and the degree to which teams were able to identify their own needs for such assistance. "The Chief Learning Officer: A Case Study at Millbrook Distribution Services" (Verna J. Willis, Gary L. May) reports the experience of one chief learning officer (CLO) at a corporation seeking to become a learning organization, describing how and why his position changed and why the title CLO signals a change in corporate thinking about human resource development. "Integrating Work and Learning" (Gene L. Roth, Edward Raspiller) explains how integration of work and learning was identified as the "common ground" between union leadership and the management team of a manufacturing plant. This case study highlights aspects of a federally funded workplace literacy project that featured learning-to-learn and team learning strategies for workers. Papers contain references. (KC)

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# SYMPOSIUM
# [6] ORCHESTRATING WORK AND LEARNING

Chair: Susan Lynham, University of Minnesota

## Team Learning: Processes, Interventions and Assessment

Laurel S. Jeris, Illinois Benedictine College
Sara C. May, Association of Legal Administrators
John C. Redding, Institute for Strategic Learning

## The Chief Learning Officer: A Case Study at Millbrook Distribution Services

Verna J. Willis, Georgia State University
Gary L. May, Millbrook Distribution Services

## Integrating Work and Learning

Gene L. Roth, Northern Illinois University
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Academy of Human Resource Development
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# Team Learning: Processes, Interventions and Assessment

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*This study explored team learning processes. Specific attention was devoted to the degree of learning facilitator assistance needed for teams to engage in double-loop learning, and the degree to which teams were able to identify their own needs for such assistance. Using a grounded theory approach, the researchers found that only the team with full facilitation reached double-loop learning. Additionally, researchers theorized that learning facilitator framing assumptions regarding optimal conditions for team learning may be a cofactor in the number of missed opportunities for double-loop learning.*

The fast changing global marketplace inevitably leads organizational members to settings and situations where the old ways of doing things just don't work anymore. The habits once learned become self-defeating in what appear to be similar contexts but are actually strategically and structurally altered organizational settings. These experiences of dissonance are the ones that actually make change inevitable. When individual organizational members find themselves with tasks and in settings that are not comprehensible given their historically developed models of thought and action, they tend to reflect on practice (Brookfield, 1987, Mezirow, 1991, Schon, 1987). Because concrete practices have evolved in organizational contexts, reflection cannot include only individuals' inquiry into their own practices; it involves analyzing and challenging the institutional structures in which they developed. However, reflection alone is not enough to bring about innovation or possibly even adaptation. In order to do things differently, different organizational practices are needed to provide designs and environments for individuals to plan, implement, and reflect upon their work.

Such fundamental organizational changes require what Argyris and Schon (1978) refer to as double-loop learning. Most organizational change, they contend, can be characterized as the result of single-loop learning in which new actions are generated without changing the unstated, implicit assumptions (variously referred to as governing variables, mental models, paradigms, etc.) that underlie organizational actions. In contrast, double-loop learning requires the surfacing and altering of preexisting assumptions and the taking of fundamentally different forms of action as a result. Double-loop learning is essential for organizational survival amid chaotic, turbulent business conditions: "Single-loop learning is appropriate for the routine, repetitive issues -- it helps get the everyday job done. Double-loop learning is more relevant for the complex, non-programmable issues -- it assures that there will be another day in the future of the organization" (Argyris, 1992, p. 9).

A necessary component for this double-loop learning to occur is the production of new practices. The organizational nature of changing existing practices calls for the transformation to be a collective activity that builds on individual knowledge using dialogue to share mental models and develop action strategies to meet changing organizational needs. The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the collective learning process of teams under specified conditions preset by the research team. While there is an abundance of research which has provided a number of conceptual models to create optimal conditions for organizational learning, little is known about their effectiveness in terms of practical and concrete strategies to bring about results. Roles of

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interventionists, locus of control of interventions, current assumptions regarding adult learners, and existing conceptualizations of a variety of facilitative objectives (i.e., focus on task or process or both) are important aspects of new collective learning practices that demand elaboration and critique.

Our research team brought multiple perspectives to this project ranging from a strong process consultation orientation to a well developed strategic HRD focus. A shared mental model existed for creating optimal conditions for individual learning, but no real convergence was present for creating optimal conditions for team learning. We agreed that a course must be charted through the organizationally mediated experiences and strategic objectives, and that organizations function in a network of continuous and uncertain information on complex and contradictory happenings. When there is ambiguous information on what is happening in the marketplace, organizations must act in the presence of risk without clear notions of the consequences of their actions. Experimentation as a cherished and rewarded organizational practice provided the common ground for understanding the collective team learning design adapted for this study.

**Research Questions**

This exploratory study is designed to provide preliminary answers and to guide further inquiry regarding four primary questions:

1. To what degree is external assistance from a learning facilitator needed for teams to engage in double-loop learning?
2. To what degree are teams able to identify their own needs for assistance from a learning facilitator?
3. What factors influence decisions by the learning facilitator to intervene or not intervene to promote double-loop learning?
4. What are the major types of interventions employed by learning facilitators in contrast to those used by process consultants?

**Methodology**

This study explored the organizational learning processes of three teams formed in conjunction with a graduate-level university course. Each team followed a modified action learning process (Revans, 1982; Pedler, 1992) that spanned a 12-week period. One student in each team served as the host, providing an issue or problem from his or her own organization to serve as a focus for the action learning process. Each team completed multiple iterations of the learning cycle in which it planned actions, implemented the actions, reflected on the actions, and developed new plans based on what it had learned (Redding and Catalanello, 1994). According to this model, the learning cycle forms the primary unit of analysis when assessing organizational learning processes. Each cycle can be assessed across three dimensions: speed (average length of time required to complete a cycle), depth (degree of double-loop learning that occurs during each cycle), and breadth (degree to which learning is transferred to other parts of the organization or other strategic challenges) (Redding, 1996). Audiotape recordings and observer notations were made of each team meeting. In addition, each team member maintained a learning log describing his or her perceptions of the process.

Each team was provided the opportunity of using a learning facilitator. Teams were instructed regarding the role of a learning facilitator and how the learning facilitator might support the team in its learning process. They were informed that learning facilitators would not act as process consultants but would limit interventions to actions that would enhance the degree of learning that occurred in each team. The teams contracted with their learning facilitator in three different ways. Team # 1 decided not to use a learning facilitator. Team #2 decided to invite the learning facilitator to step in whenever he or she deemed necessary. Team #3 decided it would specifically ask the learning facilitator to step in when it felt the team needed help. Otherwise, the learning facilitator should not intervene. Teams were asked at the end of each iteration of a learning cycle whether they

wanted to change their contracts with their learning facilitators. None of the three teams changed its original decision.

At the end of the course, the research team reviewed individual learning logs, audiotape recordings, and observer notes. For each iteration, the research team rated the degree of learning that occurred, using the operational definitions and coding instructions outlined in Exhibit 1.

**Exhibit 1. Operational Definitions and Coding Instructions**

**Operational Definitions**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Learning Cycle*** | A three-phase process through which a team plans (P) a course of action, implements (I) a course of action, and reflects (R) regarding the degree to which the action achieved desired outcomes. |
| ***Course of Action*** | A collectively agreed-upon series of steps to achieve an intended outcome. |
| ***Intended Outcome*** | A desired result collectively agreed upon by a team. |
| ***Actual Outcome*** | The result that occurred from the team's course of action. |
| ***Framing Assumptions*** | A set of existing conditions, either explicit or implicit, which are necessary to make a given course of action valid. |
| ***Iteration*** | One complete learning cycle. The first iteration is labeled as $P^1$, $I^1$, and $R^1$. The second iteration is labeled $P^2$, $I^2$, and $R^2$, ... |

**Coding Instructions**

**Step 1: Identify each iteration of the learning cycle.**
**Step 2: Assign one or more of the following codes to each iteration:**

| | |
|---|---|
| A | ***No Perceived Error*** – $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are the same. No team member, either in logs or meetings, expressed a perception that intended outcomes and actual outcomes did not match. |
| B | ***Single-loop Learning*** – $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are different. Framing assumptions underlying $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are the same. |
| C | ***Double-loop Learning*** – $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are different. Framing assumptions underlying $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are different. |
| D | ***Missed Opportunity for Single-Loop Learning*** – $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are the same. One or more members expressed in logs or meetings perceptions that actual outcomes did not match intended outcomes. |
| E | ***Missed Opportunity for Double-Loop Learning*** – $P^n$ and $P^{n+1}$ are different. Framing assumptions are the same. One or more members questioned the validity of framing assumptions in logs or meetings. |

**Results and Conclusions**

1. After reviewing logs, audiotapes, and observer notes, the research team identified the learning cycle iterations completed by each team. Team #1 and Team #2 completed three full iterations of the learning cycle and the planning phase for a fourth iteration. Team #3 completed two full iterations and completed the planning phase for a third. As a result, eight iterations of the learning cycle were available to the research team for rating.

2. Using the operational definitions and coding instructions described in Exhibit 1, the research team reached consensus ratings for each of the eight iterations as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 1. Research Team Ratings of Learning Cycles**

| Learning Cycles | Team #1 | Team #2 | Team #3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Iteration #1 | Missed opportunity for double-loop learning | Missed opportunity for double-loop learning | Missed opportunity for double-loop learning |
| Iteration #2 | Single-loop learning; Missed opportunity for double-loop learning | Double-loop learning | Missed opportunity for double-loop learning |
| Iteration #3 | Missed opportunity for double-loop learning | No perceived error | |

According to the ratings by the research team, there were six missed opportunities for double-loop learning. Only one iteration was rated as producing double-loop learning. The incident of double-loop learning occurred immediately after an intervention by the learning facilitator. This finding supports the rarity of double-loop learning often cited in the literature (Argyris, 1992). It also indicates that active learning facilitation may be an important factor determining the degree to which double-loop learning occurs or not.

3. There were seven situations where interventions by learning facilitators may have helped teams to engage in double-loop learning. (These situations include the six missed opportunities for double-loop learning and the single incident of double-loop learning). In only one of the seven cases did the team ask for assistance from a learning facilitator. Even when team members expressed high levels of frustration and even when teams openly recognized that they were missing opportunities for double-loop learning, teams appeared to avoid asking for outside help. Such responses may be the result of defensive routines adopted to avoid "discussing the undiscussables" (Argyris, 1992, p. 40). These results suggest that if an organization wishes to enhance the likelihood of double-loop learning, it may need to mandate the use of learning facilitators, even when (or possibly especially when) resistance is being manifested by teams.

4. After the team learning process concluded, the missed opportunities for double-loop learning for all three teams were described to the three learning facilitators. Through this process, the learning facilitators were able to speculate how they might have responded to situations that occurred in the other teams. The three facilitators were asked whether, having had the opportunity, they would have intervened or not in each of the situations. In most cases, the facilitators indicated that they would not have intervened, even knowing that the incident represented a missed opportunity for double-loop learning. Several reasons were cited by learning facilitators for their decisions not to intervene. These included:

- Learning needs to be self-directed and voluntary. People need to have control over their own learning.
- Interventions must occur at "teachable moments" when people are ready to learn.
- Only the minimal amount of help needed should be provided. When you are not sure whether to intervene or not, don't.
- Teams should be given time to work things out on their own.
- Teams proceed through stages of development. Their readiness for interventions is determined by their stage of development.
- A climate of trust and cohesion is a necessary prerequisite for successful interventions.

These reasons reflect many prevailing themes in the human resource development and organization development literature regarding optimal conditions for learning and change. However, such rationale may limit the ability of learning facilitators to maximize double-loop learning. Given the necessity of double-loop learning for competitive success and organizational viability, it is important that these shared mindsets be openly questioned and explored in terms of their validity amid current realities. In other words, as HRD and OD professionals, it seems essential that we engage in our own double-loop learning regarding how we can best facilitate double-loop learning of the individuals, teams, and organizations we serve.

5. The missed opportunities for double-loop learning appeared to fall in several categories. Using a grounded theory approach, researchers categorized the missed opportunities into the three categories described in Table 2.

**Table 2. Categorization of Missed Opportunities for Double Loop Learning**

*Category A:* Team members possessed concerns about the direction of team activities that they never voiced to the team.

*Category B:* Team members expressed concerns about the direction of team activities, but these perceptions were not integrated into new understandings of the situation by the team.

*Category C:* Team members expressed concerns about the direction of team activities, and these concerns were integrated into a new understanding of the situation by the team. However, no new action were taken that reflected the new understanding.

In the effort to develop a best practices mode, these categories have been used to develop a framework for team learning interventions to increase the speed, depth, and breadth of team learning (Redding, *The Team Learning Consultant*, 1996).

**Implications for Research and Practice**

The study reported here isolated team learning as a component of organizational learning for the purposes of understanding it, intervening to improve it, and assessing its effectiveness. While team learning objectives and outcomes should be considered within a strategic organizational context, teams offer accessible research sites for increasing our understanding of how organizations adapt and compete in highly turbulent environments.

The learning cycle at the team level provided the primary unit of analysis for this research and the dimensions of speed, depth and breadth of learning were examined using a grounded theory approach. The results yielded particularly rich information regarding the depth of learning at the team level. Subsequent research designs will explore targeted assessment methodologies for the speed and breadth dimensions.

From a practical standpoint, this study may lead to a new definition of the change agent role, that of the learning facilitator. Recent contributions to the organization development literature indicate increasing dissatisfaction with the capacity of either the process consultant or, in more general terms, organization development interventions to substantially accelerate or deepen organizational responses to ill structured problems and uncertainly. The current study led to a work-in-progress that is investigating how the continuous assessment of the speed, depth and breadth dimensions of the learning cycle assists in the diagnosis of intervention opportunities and appropriate utilization of those interventions to maximize team learning.

Preliminary findings suggest that both the role of the interventionist and the desired types of interventions differ from traditional process consultation approaches when the focus is clearly on learning as opposed to group process or interpersonal dynamics. More research utilizing increasingly rigorous research designs is called for to further define and articulate the role of a team learning consultant as distinct from a process consultant.

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# The Chief Learning Officer: A Case Study at Millbrook Distribution Services

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*In a handful of American corporations seeking to become learning organizations, a rising trend is visible. This is the conversion of "corporate training " into a more powerful, more broadly defined set of responsibilities appropriate to the newly adopted title of Chief Learning Officer (CLO). This case reports the experience of one CLO, describing how and why his position changed, and why the title CLO signals a change in corporate thinking about human resource development.*

Over several decades, theorists and practitioners of human resource development have debated issues surrounding the perceived power or powerlessness of HRD to enhance the organizations they serve. Debates continue over whether HRD is or is not a profession, and what kind of preparation practitioners need to be effective (or at least perceived to be effective, which is not quite the same thing). Although training is increasingly viewed by corporate leaders as a means to gain competitive advantage in a new world economy, no solid consensus has emerged about who should be in charge of training, how they should be prepared, what they should be doing, and why.

In general, corporations and other organizations do not know why HRD and training are not identical, and they seem not to know that having responsibility for learning processes in an organization requires an in-depth knowledge base that goes beyond " business knowledge," "public knowledge, " or "company knowledge." Under pressure not only to survive but thrive, executives may wonder why they should get to know HRD any better, particularly when there are still loud voices telling them that an MBA with a few training courses may be a better bet as an HRD leader than someone who has a master's degree in HRD (Kaeter, 1995). Fortunately, visionary leaders have always listened to their own voices and chosen to create new ways of doing things. The story of HRD at Millbrook Distribution Services, a McKesson Corporation subsidiary, is reported in the second half of this discussion. It appears to be a case in point.

## Theoretical and Experiential Bases for This Study

Theoretical discussions about the nature, power, and positioning of HRD in organizations have taken many forms. For example, Hansen & Kahnweiler (1995) have approached these issues from the cultural perspective, analyzing "occupational scripts" that suggest that HRD is a subculture in organizations. They suspect that communication breakdowns occur because HRD occupational scripts do not match those of the dominant culture in which they are voiced. Pepitone (1995), a management consultant, finds communication breakdowns to be rooted in mutual misunderstandings about what management needs and about what HRD has to offer, but he also finds that trainers themselves narrowly conceive their misson and may sometimes be unduly "arrogant" (p. 10). Communication across disciplines is thus named by these writers as ultimately the central issue.

Earlier, Watkins (1989, 1991) used conceptual modeling strategies to show the divergent theory bases and variety of perceptions people have about HRD, depending on the enculturating disciplines from which they come and on the alternative metaphors they use to describe what human resource development is and does. This is indicative of paradigm differences, so that whatever "scenic overlook" one uses, HRD becomes whatever one sees. Quite bluntly, this means that HRD can be, and is individually defined on the basis of personal experience and personally held "world views" (Kuhn,

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1970). This creates enormous "translation" problems for the field. The "fifth discipline" Senge promotes --that is, system thinking that builds composite scenes from all the overlooks -- may help HRD to get past these definitional and paradigm traps (Senge, 1990).

**A Logic for a Strong, Unified, and Self-Contained HRD Function**

Watkins and Willis (1991) noted that tensions exist within HRD because practitioners continue to have difficulty seeing themselves 1) as part of a unified field , or 2) as having a deep-seated systemic role in organizations that actually has little to do with traditional classroom activity. On the basis of corporate experience and with the use of a systems conceptual analysis, Willis proposed that some of the tensions are rooted not only in loose or personalized definitions, but also in differential organizational power relationships. Tensions are generated by conventional views of HRD as filtered through the mind sets and expectations corporations have whenever "human resources" is mentioned. The results are that HRD tends to be defined *in relation to*, and even *by what it is not*. Because of the strength of this association, it is defined as a subordinate function, with much less power than it needs to be credible and to make an organizational difference. Willis has questioned whether human resource development can ever reach its full potential to help solve organization-level problems unless it is surgically separated from human resource management (Watkins & Willis, p. 98).

The researchers agree that the same logic that historically separated the information systems function from the finance department may apply to the separation of human resource development from the HR or personnel department. Issues of competitive edge, corporate social responsibility and public image, huge shakeups in staffing, changing work mores, overrun learning curves, and rapid market response needs may all be leading thoughtful executives toward taking a second look at what HRD would seem to be uniquely able to provide. HRD by holistic definition and design maneuvers among multiple systems, subsystems, and environments, synthesizing what is learned, discovering what needs to be learned, and shaping the way it is learned to create best advantage for the individuals and organizations served. The analogy between information systems and organizational learning systems differs primarily in the respect that the purpose of organizational information systems is to encode and carry data, and the purpose of organizational learning systems is to encode and carry knowledge, with intellectual rules for using it.

Making HRD universally a separate function in organizations does not in itself insure viability and added value. It can, however, be a crucial first step toward reinventing HRD as a systemic part of contemporary organizations. It needs to be conceived as something more than an auxiliary pump called in to help bail out the organization when other pumps fail; it needs to be an integral and permanent resource to the organization. No one suggests that organizations can eliminate information systems in hard times, and what is suggested is that HRD is of similar organizational value.

Kimmerling (1993), notes the promotion among practitioners of the idea of a "chief training officer" (CTO) but also reports that there are only a few of these who have actually become part of an executive team. Even though Kimmerling cites the Willis article in the *Human Resource Development Quarterly* (1991) and underlines the value of developing HRD leaders, he does not make a distinction between CTO and CLO title designations. The researchers believe that this is an important distinction. The terms "training" and "learning" convey a different sense of agency, with very different images and messages, as well as very different histories and expectations. For those who believe that metaphors and precision in wording help to create organizational realities, the idea of a CTO and the idea of a CLO are not perfectly interchangeable, and the growing of a learning culture may hang in the balance.

In the cited article, Willis took the promises of organizations that "our employees are our most important assets" seriously, chose a systems point of view and proposed the need for a Chief Learning Officer to act as "'leading part' in the creation of systemic learning cultures" (1991, pp. 181-187). Research has not revealed the extent to which that advice has been acted upon by organizations over the past five years, but it is known that the key informant and co-author of this study, Gary May , is one of a growing number of HRD leaders who have the CLO title. In naming Judith Rosenblum as Coca Cola KO Company's first Chief Learning Officer, its President and Chief Operating Officer Doug Ivester said, "This step isn't about training; it is about developing our intellectual capital, coupled with technology and new ways of learning, to create the future" (*KO This Week*, September 22, 1995, p. 3). These are

certainly vanguard appointments and it remains to be seen whether this is really a trend and whether it will continue.

Studying what happens in companies that take this step can be an important research agenda for the future, if for no other reason than the fact that CLO's are a new organizational phenomenon. Researchers are well aware that in some organizations, HRD leaders have previously risen in influence and reporting relationships on the strength of their own competence, ability to build relationships, and organizational value. But this does not mean that such well-known figures have institutionizalized this happy result for others to follow, as creating the position of CLO may do.

**Method of Inquiry**

Since the theoretical framework is, broadly, the changing nature of HRD, and specifically, leadership in HRD, it was advantageous to use conceptual model building as a research strategy. Modified case study is the methodology. A single case is reported. The researchers are aware that it does not conform to all of the criteria for case study research, but it is a beginning. It has the advantage of bypassing the issues of whether HRD is an aspect of HR, or whether it is obligated to collaborate with HRM (human resource management) any more or any less than it does with every other subgroup in the organization, for the simple reason that the CLO has been consciously made part of the executive group. Power equity issues are instantly ameliorated as well. The unlikelihood that large scale learning organizations can be created without the leadership of a qualified CLO, or someone having CLO qualifications regardless of title, is one of the most important assumptions in this study.

May has created a history of his "CLO life" over the months since his appointment, concentrating on what brought his organization to that decision, on how his position is evolving, and how cultural transformation and learning initiatives are proceeding. Because May is not yet able to draw on either qualitative or quantitative comparisons of his experience with the experiences of other CLO's, the researchers acknowledge subjectivity in the report. Such bias is inherent in self-report but has been minimized as much as possible by adding written documentation. While use of an outside interviewer might have added dimensions that May did not consider, both researchers were interested primarily and simply in recording the observations and conclusions of a bona fide CLO after two years of thinking and acting in that role. This is, in both a formal and informal sense, a story-telling and a search for patterns that may be of significance for other organizations.

**Research Questions**

As a basis for conceptual modeling, the research questions are deliberately exploratory and systemic, concerned with variables unfamiliar and contextual in nature. The researchers are looking for patterns and pattern implications that can guide future research. Some initiating questions are:

1) How should an HRD executive, at the same organizational level as a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) be expected to envision, plan, and operate in successful organizations?

2) What does it mean currently to be a CLO?

How does an HRD person first present the idea of CLO appointment to executive management? How are perceptions of HRD changed, if at all, when a CLO appointment is made? Are futurist visions and organizational change opportunities enhanced by this title change and what it implies? To what extent is the position of CLO viewed as an equivalent or counterpart to the CFO (Chief Financial Officer)? Are there indications that this title change is a real recognition that "intellectual capital," like financial capital and assets, needs executive level attention? What salient qualifications seem to allow a potential CLO to achieve that title?

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The degree to which these questions have been answered in the case of one organization, from the CLO's own point of view are left largely to the reader's own decision. The researchers' goals are served by establishing the conditions for further dialogue. The case study begins in the next section by explaining the forces that led to creation of the CLO position at Millbrook Distribution Services.

## The Millbrook Context: Forces of Change

Millbrook Distribution Services, a subsidiary of McKesson Corporation, is one of the nation's largest value-added distributors of health and beauty care, general merchandise, and specialty foods. With annual revenues exceeding $600 million, the company serves over 15,000 retailers, primarily supermarkets, across 42 states. Millbrook employs 2,700 people, including a national sales force, and has four distribution centers located in Leicester, MA, Harrison, AR, Ozark, AL, and Greenville, NC.

Millbrook was formed in January of 1994 by the merger of two separate McKesson companies which had been acquired in the mid 1980's. The merger was a response to dramatic changes taking place in the supermarket industry. Conventional supermarket operators were losing sales to "super retailers" such as Wal Mart, whose logistical innovations had led to increased efficiencies and lower prices. As the supermarket industry fought back with efforts to drive costs out of the supply chain, intense pressure was place on suppliers to lower costs by reengineering distribution and in-store services. Traditional service wholesalers, who had made their mark in a low-technology era through labor intensive services, were in trouble.

Robert Sigel, an industry veteran with a proven track record of innovation for McKesson, was appointed president and CEO of the newly formed company and given a mandate to enact sweeping changes to align Millbrook with the new business environment. Sigel, in turn, recruited a new senior management team to help redefine and restructure the business. This included the appointment of a Chief Learning Officer, to report directly to the president and serve on the Executive Committee. Sigel's announcement explained the rationale: "The appointment of Gary May as Chief Learning Officer, reporting directly to me, should send a clear signal that continuous learning is of strategic importance. We are in the process of changing into a very different company in order to respond to new realities in the marketplace. I'm counting on Gary to draw on his business background, academic training, and communication skills to help us manage through the non-stop change and transition."

May brought unique, double-barreled credentials to the new position. With a degree in business administration from Duke University, he had spent 17 years as a second-generation business owner before selling the family distribution business to McKesson in 1985. He used the change as an opportunity to focus on his long time interest in the field of training and returned to school to complete a masters degree in Human Resource Development at Georgia State University while working for McKesson as a training director. He is currently finishing doctoral work in HRD at Georgia State. May and Sigel had known each other through trade association work when they both owned family businesses and through their mutual association with McKesson. The Chief Learning Officer idea grew out of their discussions of systems theory and changing HRD paradigms based of the work of Dr. Verna Willis at Georgia State University.

## The Job of a Chief Learning Officer

The concept of Chief Learning Officer is work in progress at Millbrook and goes far beyond traditional concepts of training and development. The position is graded at senior vice president level, and works in "systemic interdependence" (Marsick & Watkins,1994) with the senior leadership of the other strategic parts of the organization: Sales, Purchasing, Finance, Information Systems, Logistics, Human Resources, and Business Process Improvement.

*Mission.* The primary mission of the position is threefold: (1) to facilitate learning and change, (2) to improve individual, team, and organizational effectiveness through the integrated use of communication media, performance consulting, training, and organizational design, and (3) to support business strategy and tactics.

***Roles.*** The position is designed first to serve as a *strategic resource*, representing the HRD perspective in the strategic planning process at senior executive level and insuring that HRD efforts are linked to the organization's strategic goals. Secondly, the position represents an *expert resource*, providing "best practices" knowledge and serving as an entry point for external consulting expertise. Finally, the position serves as *process owner* of three processes deemed critical to organizational learning: (1) managing internal and external communications, including publications, advertising, and public relations, (2) managing needs analysis, design, testing, delivery, and evaluation of performance improvement and training interventions, and (3) initiating and managing partnerships with line managers and learners to insure transfer and maintenance of learning in the workplace.

Management of the formal communication processes of the organization as part of the Chief Learning Officer's responsibilities is believed to be a leading edge innovation. Based on the writings of Diane Gayeski (1993), the assignment recognizes the importance of managing communication processes in an information age. In times of non-stop change, it is essential to bridge the traditional "islands of corporate communication" such as training and development, employee communications, public affairs, corporate media, documentation, library systems, policies and procedures, and advertising and marketing to create integrated, consistent, and coherent messages to stakeholders. As the old saying goes, to create a permanent revolution requires control of three systems: education, communication, and banking. The Chief Learning Officer at Millbrook has responsibility for two of the three.

***Organization.*** The Chief Learning Officer's staff has been kept deliberately small, building on Marsick and Watkin's (1993) concept that learning processes must be embedded in the line organization and individuals must take ownership for their own development and learning on a self-directed basis. The group consists of four functions and six positions: (1) a Learning Coordinator, responsible for the production of materials, coordination of schedules, and the maintenance of the self-directed learning centers, (2) a Communication Coordinator and a Graphic Design specialist responsible for the communication efforts, (3) a Learning Technologist, responsible for CBT and video production, and (4) two Learning Facilitators responsible for the research, design, delivery, and evaluation of learning interventions and the training of trainers. Outsourcing provides speed, flexibility, and access to additional expertise as required.

## Cultural Transformation: Example Interventions

The first two years in the new position of CLO were devoted almost exclusively to assisting with the development and communication of a new vision and strategy for the organization and tending to the cultural transformation required to support the new corporate direction. The change was complicated by the geographic diversity of the distribution centers and the distinct cultural differences of the two merged firms, one based in New England and one in the Midwest. The literature provides ample evidence of the difficulty of cultural change (e.g. Trice & Beyer, 1993; Tichy & Sherman, 1994). As Marsick and Watkins (1994) have noted: "Training programs can help deliver skills needed for organizations to change, but do not address the deep-seated mental models and attitudes or the organizational structures and norms which perpetuate them (p. 114)." Three example interventions illustrate the role of the Chief Learning Officer in the cultural transformation process.

Working in tandem with the CEO and the Executive Committee, the CLO led the design of graphic images and metaphors to help communicate the new marketplace vision for Millbrook and the new mental models and behaviors required for success. With the involvement of line employees, four images were constructed (The Millbrook Team Mission, Core Values, Ten Commitments, and Cycle of Success) and incorporated on a continuing basis into the corporate decor, communications, training programs, and team meetings. However, these formal statements of organizational philosophy have little power to change behavior without the concurrent reinforcement of what Schein (1991) calls "mechanisms for embedding and transmitting culture (p. 224)." In popular terms, it's called "walking the talk." Here, the CLO's contribution was to work collectively and individually with the members of the Executive Committee and department managers on understanding and operationalizing Schein's ten mechanisms (see Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Mechanisms for Embedding and Transmitting Culture (Schein, 1991)

| Primary | Secondary |
|---|---|
| 1. What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control | 1. The organization's design and structure |
| 2. Leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises | 2. Organizational systems and procedures |
| 3. Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching by leaders | 3. Design of physical space, facades, and buildings |
| 4. Criteria for allocation of rewards and status | 4. Stories, legends, myths, and parables about important events and people |
| 5. Criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, and excommunication | 5. Formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters |

Another key intervention led by the CLO was the development of a "warp speed restructure protocol" designed to examine functional norms, take layers out of the organizational structure, reduce costs, improve communications, and set the stage for process reengineering and continuous improvement initiatives. This initiative drew heavily on Weisbord's (1987) socio-technical theories such as the future search conference and a variety of OD process tools to effect rapid changes in a department's structure while involving all the players in an open and candid way.

A third example of how the CLO has helped support culture transformation is the development with McKesson OD staff of a proprietary workshop series called "Trekking the In-Betweens" based on a change model developed by William Bridges (1991). The workshops were delivered by senior line managers and helped equip employees with ways to deal constructively with the confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity of non-stop change.

**Learning Initiatives: Example Projects**

The cultural transformation effort is considered a never-ending process, but as the interventions have taken root, attention has turned to learning initiatives designed to support the marketplace strategy and address deficiencies in skills essential to maintaining the new culture. This includes the construction of a "comprehensive learning plan" designed to replace the traditional classroom paradigm with more individual assessment and self-directed /action learning initiatives supported by the performance management system. This on-going, systemic learning process is then supplemented by specific learning projects linked to strategic issues.

For example, during a strategic planning retreat facilitated with the senior executives, it was agreed that the organization as a whole lacked critical thinking and problem solving skills. This deficiency, which was perpetuating inefficiencies and contributing to higher costs, was selected as the key learning intervention for the fiscal year and integrated with all the other cost improvement projects targeted by the Executive Committee.

Another strategic issue is revenue growth in the face of an intense, competitive marketplace. Here the CLO was involved with an external marketing firm, the Executive Committee, senior sales management, and his communications staff in the formulation of a new marketing strategy and advertising campaign based on the tag line *distributing solutions*. This, in turn, led to the development of a new consultative selling model and skills training for the sales force to support the new strategy.

## Implications for HRD Professionals

The Chief Learning Officer is a new organizational phenomenon and the experiences of one company certainly does not represent an irreversible trend. However, some implications for HRD professionals who seek to earn a seat at the boardroom table can be gleaned from Millbrook's experience to date.

***CEO Initiative.*** The Chief Learning Officer position, because it breaks traditional paradigms, requires initiation and strong support from a visionary CEO and will best take root in a context of overall organizational change. This is not a concept that can be sold from the bottom up.

***Credentials.*** In order to be considered a peer at the Executive Committee level, a Chief Learning Officer requires both a broad set of competencies and functional business experience. The advice to HRD practitioners is to career path through one or more line jobs. Managers who have met payrolls and operating budgets have credibility that allows them the latitude to leverage academic theory.

***Competencies.*** The critical skill profile may be described by what Gayeski (1993) calls the *Renaissance communicator* - a person of broad intellectual interests with strong interpersonal skills who knows how to leverage communication technologies and draw on diverse resources across functional boundaries to help the company achieve strategic goals. Strategic thinking skills and expertise in change management are also essential.

***Tolerance for Ambiguity.*** Many HRD professionals today remain focused on the old classroom paradigm and prefer the concrete world of the course catalogue and the Likert scale. The biggest shock of the boardroom is to learn that there are no clear answers to the strategic issues, only tradeoffs. No one has "the final plan." The world of business today is an uncharted sea of constant change. Solutions to problems often become obsolete before implemented. This calls for a high tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility, and the tenacity to persist.

## Summary and Concluding Thoughts

The researchers have chosen to preserve the integrity of each others' contributions in separate sections so that the experience-based academic view and the contemporary practitioner view would be clearly distinguished. An effort to reconcile differences in writing style would have been artificial. Nevertheless, it should be obvious that patterns predicted in theory have been found in practice. The researchers are in very firm agreement that both new models for HRD leadership and new HRD positioning are needed and can work exceptionally well. Because of May's dual academic preparation and long experience as a corporate leader, there can be no implication that academic degrees in HRD alone would have qualified him for the position of CLO. But neither can it be inferred that a business degree with a few added training courses would have provided the educating skills and depth of insight required to perform this innovative, "leading part" role.

Another matter that can not be addressed with any confidence at this time is whether a conceptual model of accountability and power equivalency between CLO ( performing human intellectual assets) and CFO (performing capital assets) is implied from the case study. Organizationally, it looks as if each has equal power at Millbrook, but a test of this would be the citing of actual instances when the strategic resource, expert resource, and process owner's influence overruled capital asset preservation influence. Certainly the CLO's sphere of influence has already expanded far beyond the traditional boundaries of human resource development. There is much to learn about the implications of this; in terms of time in position, this is a young incumbency. It will be interesting to see how different the position and responsibilities are a few years down the line, and whether the learning organization of Millbrook remains strong and committed.

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# Integrating Work and Learning

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*There is a lack of practical strategies for integrating work and learning in traditional manufacturing environments. This paper explains how integration of work and learning was identified as the "common ground" between union leadership and the management team of a local manufacturing plant. This case study highlights aspects of a federally funded workplace literacy project. The project features learning-to-learn and team learning strategies for workers.*

During the next few decades, the private sector is expected to eclipse the public sector as the predominant educational institution in the United States (Davis and Botkin, 1994). Why is the private sector expected to embrace education as an important aspect of its existence? What prompts researchers to predict such an occurrence? In large part, it is because business, more so than public education, is creating changes that will help workers cope in a global economy. Leaders of the private sector are becoming increasingly aware of the connections between individual, team, and organizational learning, and corporate survival. Public education, in particular community colleges, is increasingly being called upon to work with the private sector in workforce preparation and development.

The capacity of workers to learn is becoming a key strategic advantage for American organizations. Knowledge is doubling approximately every seven years. In technical fields, half of what students learn in their early years of college is obsolete by the time they graduate. The need for workers to keep pace in the labor-force is acute. For companies to stay competitive, and for workers to stay employable, they must continue to learn (Davis and Botkin, 1994).

The intent of this paper is to neither exalt proven practices nor lend credence to popular trends in the literature. Rather, the intent is to highlight a tri-partite relationship that is based on workplace learning. The authors depict the processes and outcomes of a partnership among a community college, management of a local manufacturing plant and its union leadership. Through an arduous planning process, the union and management of the this plant found common ground between their respective strategic plans. That common ground was a commitment to make education the focal point for their co-existence. Learning and development of the workforce was identified by both sides as the critical element of the plant's survival in a global market. A learning center was created and individualized education plans were created for workers. This case study acknowledges the trials and tribulations of this endeavor, and focuses on lessons that have been learned.

## Factors Associated with the Context

This case study involves a manufacturing facility that employs approximately 400 workers. The plant is located about five miles south of its closest town, with a population of 15,000 people. The region is one of the most economically depressed areas of the state. A rural community college that was founded in the 1960s serves the region. The community college had a fall 1995 head-count of 2,500 credit students and annually serves over 20,000 non-credit students.

The economic development officer of the community college had been working with this plant since 1988. One of the functions of the economic development officer was to write job training plans

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for regional industries. Managers of this local firm were interested in creating a more comprehensive job development program. They were uncertain as to whether any of their skill training was having a worthwhile effect. Plant managers were interested in creating a comprehensive training effort that could be coordinated at a higher level.

In 1994 the economic development officer became aware of the federal grant competition for workplace literacy projects. A cross-section of people representing the community college and the union and management of the local plant were pulled together to initiate the grant writing process. Focus groups were used to gather input from a variety of constituencies. These groups met six to eight times as a means of gathering input for the grant application.

The final version of the proposal was presented to the plant management team with some apprehension. The proposal called for the plant to invest considerable resources into the effort. A major concern was the use of company time for employees to develop workplace literacy skills. Although there was concern about this issue, several of the managers viewed this expenditure as a wise investment for achieving the project's objectives.

**Project Start-Up: Strategies for Building Support**

Key strategies were used during the project start-up that had a significant impact on the success of the project. Each year the management team develops a strategic plan and tactical plan. The strategic plan spans a three-year period and the tactical plan is for one year. For the first time, the union also developed a strategic plan. With the help of a facilitator, union and management representatives converged and identified common ground between the two plans. During these meetings, it became increasingly apparent that both the union and the management plans had striking similarities. Both parties recognized education as the means for helping them achieve their respective plans. The workplace literacy grant was seen by both union and management representatives as a means to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Training and development became a rallying point in the eyes of both union and management.

One manager commented on the significance of these early planning sessions that involved representatives of the union, management team and the community college:

> We spent several days with that activity, working through several issues and getting a lot on the table. That set the tone and jelled the working relationships that we needed.

Developing a shared understanding in the strategic planning sessions was very important. Not only was it important for the union and management leaders to find common ground, it was also significant for community college personnel to benefit from seeing and hearing their interactions. This learning contributed to the strength of the partnership. One manager commented on the need for the community college representatives to gain insight about the day to day concerns of a manufacturing facility:

> It got the community college people familiar with our culture at the start-up of this project. It helped all of us develop a collective frame of reference.

Another timely strategy during the project start-up involved staff development. Representatives from this partnership (management, union, and the community college) observed other environments in which similar projects were operating. It was important for representatives of these groups to listen to their peers at other sites talk about the trials and tribulations of such a project. By traveling together to observe other learning centers, a sense of unity was created and a shared understanding was forged. This was especially powerful for the union representatives. They were able to hear about the benefits of such a project from other union leaders. The union leaders stressed that this type of project should be jointly owned by union and management. They emphasized that this project would be good for union members. The union representatives came back from these trips as staunch advocates of this project. One union representative has since been assigned full-time to the grant as a promoter and recruiter.

**Discoveries and Solutions**

As with most projects, discoveries are made as activities take place and time passes. Within the first year

of operation of the learning center, several realizations occurred to the project staff. The discoveries and their solutions are depicted in the following narrative.

***Varied Start-Up Times.*** There are 54 start times per 24-hour period for front-line workers at the plant. Workers must be scheduled into the learning center with minimal disruption of plant production. With the exception of warehouse workers, all workers who leave the line for class (or anything else) must have a replacement person to fill-in for them.

The solution to the replacement worker problem was the creation of five new positions called "grant relief." These workers must know and be able to operate effectively in all of the jobs in the manufacturing process. The manufacturing line is divided into two distinct areas: manufacturing and packaging. The relief workers are also divided in this manner to reduce the learning curve for each individual.

***Individual Learning.*** The scheduling constraints associated with the manufacturing processes had an impact on the type of instruction that could be delivered in the learning center. Most of the instruction had to be designed for individuals, not "classes." Several of the instructors hired for this project had minimal experience individualizing instruction or teaching in a laboratory setting.

A solution to this problem included staff development for instructors that helped them understand learning styles and the characteristics of adult learners. Numerous meetings were held to help instructors develop lesson plans for specific courses and learning experiences. Instructors participated in a satellite down-link with a comparable workplace literacy project in Massachusetts. Through this exposure to a similar program, the instructors listened to accounts of familiar obstacles that had been encountered by their peers in the preceding year. This reassuring interaction deflated the pressure of unrealistic expectations, and allowed the instructors to establish a comfortable pace with individual learners.

***Peak Learning Times for Workers.*** The learning center planned and delivered workshops on learning-how-to-learn for workers. These workshops illuminated specific attributes of the plant's workforce. A majority of the learners had a kinesthetic/tactual learning style and they preferred to learn in groups. They had specific peak learning times and many did not have a history of positive learning experiences in formal settings.

A solution was to schedule workers into the learning center during their preferred learning times. The union coordinator was the person primarily responsible for scheduling workers in the learning center. First, he gathered and sorted information regarding the preferred learning times of workers. Next, he mastered a basic spreadsheet that allowed him to organize a schedule for the learning center. Finally, he organized the relief workers in a manner that would be least disruptive to plant production.

***Creating Individualized Learning Plans.*** The ACT Workkeys Assessment System was selected as the assessment tool of choice by the original steering committee of the project. An initial step was to profile the 43 different jobs in the manufacturing process in the plant. These assessments indicated that the workforce was not lacking in basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics to perform their jobs. However, many workers did need to enhance their "soft-skills." These skills included listening, speaking, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

The ACT Workkeys assessments and job profiling provided a planning base for solving the learning needs of workers. Learner objectives and assessment instruments were developed by instructors with input from project staff, front-line supervisors, subject matter experts, and floor workers. Examples and problems used in the instruction were taken directly from the workplace. Individual education plans (IEPs) were created jointly by the instructors and workers. The IEP was initiated when the student walked into the learning center, and it stressed the concept of learning-how-to-learn. The learning path began at that point and crystallized when assessment results were discussed between the worker and the instructor.

***Maintaining the Motivation of Learners.*** Workers have been attending the learning center for up to six months. Some of the workers have completed their GED and many have completed one or more courses. Motivation does not seem to be as high as it was when the learning center first opened its doors. Some workers do not seem to have an understanding of what this experience can do for them personally. Some workers are concerned that their training should be for their own personal benefit and not so much for the benefit of the company.

A solution to this concern pertained to recognition of the learners' achievements. Project staff felt that some type of formal documentation would help workers feel that they were attaining transferable

skills and not solely benefitting the needs of the company. A customized program certificate is currently being developed by project personnel. The certificate involves CEU credits, developmental education credits, and vocational education credits. The intent of this credential is to have it recognized by the local industrial base as a meaningful worker achievement.

**The Significance of the Industry/Education Partnership**

The central theme of this project is integrating work and learning. It has taken the individual and collective strengths of the union, management team, and the community college to pursue this theme. Each of the partners has contributed expertise and learned valuable lessons during the project's brief life-span. The benefits accrued by the partners are delineated in the following narrative.

***The Community College.*** The possibility of succeeding with a federal grant and a local industry in this rural, economically depressed area was very appealing to its leaders. The project allowed the college to build its capacity to better serve the economic development needs of the region. Prior to this grant the college relied a great deal on brokering services that were available from external sources. The college did not have the expertise or experience to meet the varied needs of local industries. As a result of this grant, the college has been able to train its own personnel in the needs assessment process. Specifically, the college now has personnel with knowledge and experience with the ACT WorkKeys Assessment System. An administrator at the college commented on the significance of this project to related internal functions of the college:

> We are much more cohesive now in this institution. We have seen what can happen when we work together with an industry. We are redefining our roles. We are identifying our own internal and external customers and our processes.

Both the union and management representatives value the role that the community college plays in this project. The college provides an objective third party role in a culture that has a history of intense union /management negotiations. One manager stated:

> What has happened is that our management and our union people do not see the college representatives as having any other agenda than education. People do not connect the college representatives with a management group. That is important, because the union might perceive management to have an agenda that is not of interest to them. The community college presence has created a neutral territory that has a great deal of power to it. It provides a completely independent source of training.

***The Management Team.*** This project provided the management team an opportunity to gain external support for creating a learning agenda in the workplace. This particular plant has a gain-sharing plan that is aimed at accountability at the team level. Many of the skills that are being taught in the learning center tend to enhance the skills that are needed for groups of workers to function as highly effective work teams. One manager stated:

> I am beginning to see this when I am on the floor. The workers are much more likely to talk to me about team performance and team results. In the past, I used to spend my time dealing with personnel concerns and grievances. Now, much more of the conversation that I have on the floor pertains to plant performance and team performance. We set a record yesterday for our performance from last week. Those types of things are becoming more prevalent. I attribute these performances to a variety of factors, but I am not overlooking the significance of this project.

***The Union.*** This project has provided a means for enhancing the skill levels of its members. The union favored getting assistance in identifying major literacy problems. They embraced the notion of being able to identify people who wanted help and who were serious about improving their life skills. The union leadership saw this effort as an acknowledgment that management was moving beyond job skill training. They saw this as a means to get to the root of something that might ultimately move the production and the workforce forward. A community college administrator commented on the significance of involving union representatives in the development of training:

> Another key benefit has been the involvement of the production workers in the training. I have heard from a number of people that it has been a wondrous thing for them. It has been a real growth experience and it came at a good time. It has helped

create better feelings about management. In addition, it has created a much greater awareness and understanding about the community college.

**Toward a Common Future**

At the close of the first year, this project has enrolled 30% of the eligible workers of the plant and has logged over 3,000 hours of training. Customized curriculum outlines have been completed for 6 courses and the learning center has been integrated into the work culture of this manufacturing facility. The collaborative efforts of the three partners have paved the way for continuing success. A key manager of the plant stated his optimism for the learning center:

> This is a true win-win proposition from my perspective. A lot of it has to do with general good will. So many of the things that we do pertain to improving productivity and efficiency. Many people feel that those things make people work more or harder -- and there always seems to be a negative pitch to it. This project has no negative edges whatsoever. It all has to do with education and learning. It has been a very uplifting experience. People really feel good about their involvement with it.

The impetus for this effort has been the federal funding that has functioned as seed money for the partners. The intent of this project is to have such a positive impact that the management team and the union leadership of the plant will recognize its significance and find local revenues to continue its operation. Regionally, the project is gaining recognition. Local elected officials and key representatives from area businesses have toured the learning center and/or attended meetings that featured the project. This project is a good example of what can be accomplished if companies are given incentives to bring education, labor and management together to explore the mutual benefits of lifelong learning and on-going training for their employees and partners. The future of American businesses relies on the abilities of its workers to invigorate the work-place and develop competitive advantages for themselves and their organizations (Slocum, McGill and Lei, 1994). This project has been an invigorating experience for all three of the partners.

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